

*Borne the Battle*

*Episode # 144*

Joseph Pennington – Navy Seabee Veteran, Allstate Director of Military Programs

<https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59953/borne-battle-144-joseph-pennington-navy-seabee-veteran-allstate-director-military-affairs/>

(Text Transcript Follows)

[00:00:00] Music

## **[00:00:11] OPENING MONOLOGUE:**

**Tanner Iskra (TI):** Let's get it! Wednesday, May 8, 2019. *Borne the Battle*. Brought to you by the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am your host, Marine Corps Veteran Tanner Iskra. Hope everyone had a good week outside of podcast-land. I am having an outstanding week. My allergies have gotten a lot better, my ear is no longer plugged up, I'm no longer- my head is no longer feeling like it's ready to explode, I'm eating meat and cheese in between takes, life is good. Uh, this weekend I was feeling so good I went out to the *Carry the Load* events that happened here in the D.C. area. The, uh, eastern relay was coming through the Lincoln Memorial, through the Arlington National Cemetery, so, I decided to take my phone, myself, and we did an Instagram Live coverage of their walk-through Arlington National Cemetery. We listened to a lot of really great stories. For those that walked with me and shared their stories, thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. Uhm, those were some really, really powerful stories. And for those that- that watched and listened to those stories on our Instagram Live, thank you for listening to them. Uhm, it made me reflect on this upcoming Memorial Day and I hope it did for you, as well. So, those relays are still going. [Background music playing]. And for those that don't know, or didn't listen to last week's episode, from April 25 through May 22, the VA's National Cemetery Administration is partnering with the nonprofit, *Carry the Load*, to honor Veterans leading up to Memorial Day. *Carry the Load's* mission is to provide active, meaningful ways to honor and celebrate the sacrifices made by our nation's heroes. Military, Veterans, first responders, and their families. They are currently conducting three national relays totaling 11,000 miles. 26 VA National Cemeteries in 17 states will serve as relay points along the route. In conjunction with the arrival of the *Carry the Load* relay teams, each National Cemetery along the route will unveil a commemorative plaque, a tribute to the fallen, honoring Veterans and Gold Star families. So, with that being said, *Carry the Load* is still on the

march with their three relays going to Dallas for Memorial Day. Uh, this week, they will be stopping at the Raleigh National Cemetery, tomorrow, May 9 at 7:30 am. After that, they will be at the Fort Jackson National Cemetery in Columbia, South Carolina on Saturday, May 11 at 7:30 am. Those are eastern standard time. Now the mid-west route will not be going to any National Cemeteries this week. But you can find out where any one of the rally points are by going to [carrytheload.org](http://www.carrytheload.org) [Link to *Carry the Load* website:

<http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>]. And I'll put, the, uh, link in the show notes. Along the west coast route, they will be at the Miramar National Cemetery today, Wednesday, May 8 at 7:30 am. They will be at the Fort Rosencrantz National Cemetery in San Diego, later on today at 5:30 pm. Tomorrow, Thursday, they will be at the Riverside National Cemetery in Riverside, California at 5 pm. The west coast route will also be at the Prescott National Cemetery in Prescott, Arizona Saturday, May 11 at 4 pm. And they will also be at the Fort Bliss National Cemetery, and that will be their last National Cemetery along their route by the time the next episode drops, on Wednesday May 15 at 12:30. Again, all those are pacific standard time. For further information on *Carry the Load* you can either a: go to my blog from last week [Link to last week's blog: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/59611/borne-the-battle-143-stephen-holley-navy-seal-veteran-naval-academy-quarterback-carry-the-load-ceo/>] or two, you can go to [carrytheload.org](http://www.carrytheload.org) [Link to *Carry the Load* website:

<http://www.carrytheload.org/site/PageServer?pagename=home>]. They have routes, they have maps. And I will put all the routes and march in my show notes.

Little bit of feedback from last week. This one is from KGAUGA- kay-KGAUGA. This one is from KGAUGA, "An amazing way to honor our nation's heroes. This podcast is an amazing resource, I'm so glad I found it. I love listening to other's stories, and this podcast does just that. This podcast honors our nation's heroes and gives them a chance to share their stories and experiences. Taking a break from everyday life to listen to another story makes me so happy. Thank you to those who serve and thank you to those who help our nation's heroes." Well, we thank you, KGAUGA, for, uh, for that review. This next one was from Ernest E. Gaiser, and it was on last episode's blog. "It is a pleasure to read the stories of our heroes and fellow veterans. I took basic training in 1954 at Fort Ord, California, and advanced training as a combat engineer at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Was then assigned to the 4th Engineer Battalion at Hanau, Germany, transferred on March 15, 1955 to Headquarters Company 2nd Battalion 26th Infantry Regiment at Bamberg, Germany. On Nov 1955 I was discharged from active duty and

assigned to the 422nd MP Guard Company Army Reserve where I served until my discharge in 1959. In 1965 I returned to my native Switzerland to live. Serving in the US Army was for me a great experience and I eagerly read the emails from the VA. Best regards, Ernest E. Gaiser.” Well, Ernest, thank you for reading and/or listening to the show. And thank you for your service, as well. And if you yourself would like to give some feedback, please feel free at- after any- any episode. Go to [blogs.va.gov](https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/borne-the-battle-podcast/) [Link to *Borne the Battle* blog: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/borne-the-battle-podcast/>] find the blog that- that relates to this episode. Go ahead leave a comment. Email me at [podcast@va.gov](mailto:podcast@va.gov) or leave a rating and review on Apple or Stitcher or whatever pod catching app that you listen to the show. Speaking of ratings, reviews, as you know, cause I promote it every week that 100 ratings and reviews is the target for this podcast. [Background music playing]. For a bonus episode, featuring Adrian Cronauer of *Good Morning, Vietnam* interviewing the legendary director, producer, comedian Mel Brooks. This interview has never been heard, ever. It was dropped in my lap about the first week I started this podcast. And, I would like to give it to you as a bonus episode once we reach 100 ratings and reviews. We’re currently at 65, I’m looking for 100. Help me help you, and I look forward to getting that out to you as soon as possible.

## **[00:06:38] NEWS RELEASES:**

(TI):

So, a trifecta of really good news releases within this past week. I’m gonna get into one that was released right after the last episode dropped. This one says, “For immediate release. VA and Microsoft partner to enhance care, rehabilitation, and recreation for Veterans with limited mobility. Xbox adaptive controllers will be distributed across facilities within nation’s largest integrated healthcare system. Today the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Microsoft announce a new collaboration to enhance opportunities for education, recreation and therapy for Veterans with mobility limitations by introducing the Xbox adaptive controller. A videogame controller designed for people with limited mobility in select VA rehabilitation centers around the country. The partnership, which was formalized April 18 will provide controllers and services to Veterans as part of therapeutic and rehabilitative activities aimed at challenging muscle activation and hand-eye coordination. And, greater participation in social and recreational activities.” Got a couple of quotes and then it says, “Together, VA and Microsoft identified an opportunity to introduce or reintroduce gaming

to Veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, and neurological or other injuries at 22 VA Medical Centers across the United States. Microsoft is donating its Xbox adaptive controller, game consoles, games, and other adaptive gaming equipment as part of the collaboration. Designated VA staff will engage with Veterans using the equipment and share feedback with Microsoft on therapeutic utility and the Veteran experience.” Couple more quotes. Uh, by people, and then it says, “Microsoft and VA have a longstanding strategic partnership, working together for more than 20 years to provide the best possible care and service to Veterans. Gaming is a popular pastime—” no kidding— “of military personnel, and access to the Xbox adaptive controller in VA Rehabilitation Centers provides the opportunity for Veterans to experience gaming’s various benefits, including staying connected with friends and family across the world, building esprit de corps through competitive or cooperative game play, and providing stress relief. Microsoft’s initial contributions will be allocated across 22 VA facilities in addition to the controllers and other equipment will be available for Veterans to use at events hosted by the VA’s Office of National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events, such as the National Veteran Wheelchair Games. The following 16 centers have confirmed participation to date, with at least 6 additional centers to come.” As of right now, the VA Centers participating are the Augusta VA Medical Center, the Central Alabama VA Health Care System, Central Texas Veterans HCS, Chillicothe VA Medical Center, Dayton VA Medical Center, the Memphis VA Medical Center, the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. The Richmond VA Medical Center, the VA St. Louis Health Care System, South Texas Veterans Health Care System, which is the Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital. South Texas Veterans Health Care System, the Kerrville Division. James A. Haley Veterans Hospital, Tampa. The VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System, the VA New York Harbor Health Care System, the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, and the VA Puget Sound—of course, ‘cause Seattle is the home of Xbox— Health Care System. Visit [www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/index.asp](http://www.va.gov/healthpartnerships/index.asp) [Link to VA Health Partnerships website]. And if I were you, I- honestly, I’m a gamer myself, and, if your VA Medical Center was not on the list, I would definitely, if it was me, I would definitely be, uh, petitioning my VA Medical Center to take part. ‘Cause I think that- that’s a really great program. Uh, that story was actually covered, uh, you can read about it on- in The Verge, uh, on PC Gamer. Uh, as soon as that one came out, a lot of news outlets picked that one up. And you can google VA and

Microsoft and you can read all about that on a number of different platforms.

The next one is, “For immediate release. VA Celebrates Science of Hope during National Research Week. In celebration of important medical research conducted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Medical Centers nationwide will showcase innovative solutions that VA scientists are developing and bringing into clinical practice with the help of university partners and other public and private institutions during VA’s Research Week which is May 13 through 17. VA Medical Centers will commemorate VA Research Week with special events such as tours of their research facilities, lectures, poster displays, and luncheons to honor the Veterans who voluntarily participate in VA research studies. The Science of Hope, VA’s 29 Research Week theme, underscores the promise that the Department’s research brings to Veterans and their loved ones coping with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, limb loss, chronic disease, and other serious health challenges.” Uh, got- got a quote or two and then it goes, “Examples of current VA research include: advances in prosthetics, such as artificial hands that restore the sense of natural touch, seeing footage—” that- that’s actually really cool, “and in-precision oncology, which uses molecular analysis of tumors and other individual patient factors to customize cancer treatment.” Never seen anything on that, be curious to check it out. “A focus of VA Research Week includes VA’s Million Veteran Program, one of the world’s largest genomic databases as of mid-April, the program has enrolled nearly 750,000 Veterans. Researchers using MVP data have published important findings on the genetics of hypertension, substance abuse disorders, and other important topics. To learn more about the work of VA researchers past and present, visit [www.research.va.gov](http://www.research.va.gov) [Link to VA Research webpage] and for more information on local and national events marking VA Research Week in your area, visit [www.research.va.gov/researchweek](http://www.research.va.gov/researchweek) [Link to VA Research Week webpage]. This month also marks Mental Health Month here at the VA. And, in observance of Mental Health Month, VA is launching a new campaign called *The Moment When* in recognition of the resilience of those who have served our country, to honor their sacrifices, and to learn and be inspired by their amazing stories. Mental Health Month is an opportunity to build awareness of mental health challenges and treatment options. And to let people know that recovery is possible. This campaign is a part of the Make the Connection program where nearly 500 Veterans have shared their stories of strength and recovery. Make the Connection also features a Resource

Locator where Veterans, their family, and their friends can find local support” to whatever resources they need. “To learn more, visit [www.maketheconnection.net/mhm](http://www.maketheconnection.net/mhm)” [Link to Make the Connection website].

## **[00:13:10] SHOW INTRODUCTION:**

(TI): So, I’m not alone today. I’m joined for this episode’s pregame with Zach Wheeler, one of our interns at the VA Digital Media engagement team. Uh, he’s an aspiring professional podcaster. Say “hello” Zach.

Zach Wheeler (ZW): Hi, everyone, I’m Zach, nice to meet you.

(TI): So, Johns Hopkins University, right?

(ZW): Yes, indeed.

(TI): Awesome. You know every time I hear the words Johns Hopkins, I think of a very famous line from- from uh, *Stepbrothers*. That Will- Will Ferrell says.

(ZW): Ah, yes [Laughter].

(TI): Yeah, I’m sure that’s been passed around a lot of- I’m sure that’s talked around a lot at the, uh, at the school.

(ZW): Just about every day.

(TI): [Laughter]. You still studying international studies?

(ZW): Yeah, I’m still do- uh, well I kind of focus on international relations, but my major is international studies, yeah.

(TI): What’s the difference?

(ZW): Well, international studies is a little more broad, so, it could be kind of – the way we do it at Hopkins is, it’s history, economics, international relations, and a language. Uhm, and so, I do all of those, but my, you know, my passion is really international relations and foreign policy.

(TI): Okay. Uhm, have you started some of the classes for your major, or you still in general studies?

(ZW): I’ve- I’ve been, uhm, the way Hopkins works is, they don’t really have, kind of general course requirements. So, I’ve actually- I’m almost done

with my major, surprisingly. So, I'm not sure what my next year's gonna be, but —

(TI): How long's- how long, uh, so, what- what are you- how long have you been going to school? I thought you were a freshman.

(ZW): Yeah, so no, I'm a sophomore, actually. On my second year, but I only have one more year because I was recently accepted to a five-year master's program through, uhm, the Hopkins Graduate School in D.C. So, my senior year and a year after that I'll be taking masters classes instead of undergraduate classes.

(TI): Dang, Zach. Put in the work.

(ZW): Yeah, I guess so.

(TI): So- well, congratulations. So, Zach, it's, uh, the first part of May. It's- it's got to be finals season out there.

(TI): Yes, it indeed is, unfortunately for me. I think I have- I have two big finals coming up, one on, uhm, Wednesday and the following Monday. But, uhm, kind of more pressing was these final papers that I had to write. Uhm, and so last night, very early in the morning, my friends and I finished our final group paper for our class, and we talked about U.S. foreign policy strategy towards 5G wireless technology. Which was really a fun paper. But —

(TI): That was fun?

(ZW): It was. I mean I kind of like- I kind of like the tech- emerging technology —

(TI): Sure. I'm just —

(ZW): plus, foreign policy [Laughter].

(TI): Uhm, I'm just playing with ya, I'm just playing with ya.

(ZW): Yes.

(TI): So, Zach, you've been an intern for the entire year. And, you've done two episodes and you- you've listened to a lot of *Borne the Battle*. And, you know, what have you learned as an intern with the- with the Department of Veterans Affairs and- and with this podcast?

(ZW): Well, I guess, do you mean in kind of like- in a big, in a- in a larger sense, one thing I've learned is just how many different stories of Veterans there are out there. Because, to be honest, when I entered into the internship, I really didn't know anything about the VA. Uhm, or at least, not as much as I should've. Uhm, I didn't really understand like sacrifices and, uhm, you know, efforts Veterans go through to, uhm, you know, following their service. And so, I think this year just learning so many different stories about Veterans has really inspired me, which is really cool. Uhm, but in terms of just also general skills, I've learned a lot about, uhm, you know, how to communicate with others and get good interview questions, and really tell a story. Which has been fun. And my family really does not have a military history. So, it honestly has never even- like before joining *Borne the Battle* it never really crossed my mind and I think, uhm, just because of my, you know, current study situations I'm not sure if I'd jump right ahead into the military. But I think, uhm, I've really learned a lot and I- and I really value and appreciate those who do serve.

(TI): So last time we heard you was back- way back in episode 130. Uh, why don't you tell the listeners why you're on today.

(ZW): Yeah, so today, I, uhm, I- well actually a couple weeks ago, I talked to Mr. Joseph B. Pennington of Allstate. Uhm, and we talked- we had a really interesting conversation about how Allstate is a military-friendly employer, uhm, and just the initiatives they had in terms of recruiting, uhm, Veterans and recruiting anyone that's served in the military. And, they do a really great job, so, it was- it was really interesting talking to Mr. Pennington.

(TI): How did you find your interview?

(ZW): Okay, really random, actually. But I had a friend at school, who told me that he worked with someone at Allstate, and that they were recently ranked highly as a Veteran-friendly employer. And so, it was very random, and so I said, "Oh, hey, do you mind sending me a link to this person?" So, I sent them an email and then I got in contact with Allstate's media team, and they put me in contact with Mr. Pennington, who is- is currently the Head of Allstate's Military Recruitment program. So.

(TI): Zach, I'm- I'm impressed that when I challenged you to find somebody outside of your university circle, you took a shot and you landed with a quality- with what I think is a quality interview. Zach, go ahead and- and give me- give us your best intro.



(ZW): Okay. So, this week's guest is Joseph B. Pennington, the Director of Military and Veteran Programs at Allstate. Joseph Pennington joined Allstate after serving a total of 12 years as Navy Seabee, and as the Director of Military Programs, Mr. Pennington is responsible for leading Allstate's military and Veteran programs, including recruitment, onboarding, networking and business success metrics.

(TI): Alright, listeners. Enjoy.

[00:18:48] Music

### **[00:18:56] Interview:**

(ZW): Thank you very much Mr. Pennington for coming on the podcast today.

Joseph Pennington (JP): Thank you, appreciate you having us.

(ZW): So, let's- let's start off with our- our first question we always like to ask. Is, could you talk a little bit about your decision to join the military? What- what really prompted that?

(JP): Sure, sure. Absolutely. Yeah, so, I- I probably had a, uh- uh maybe a different path than a lot of people. Uhm, it- it never seemed like an actual thing to do in my family. That wasn't something that was a, uh, you know, a generational, uhm- my parents didn't do it, none of my uncles were in the military. But I- I grew up in a multigenerational household with my grandparents. And, uh, and my grandfather was a World War Two Vet.

(ZW): Oh, wow.

(JP): He never pushed us to join, but yeah. But he, uh- but I would spend hours just listening to his stories of his time in the, uh, in the Pacific Theater and so, you know, some of them appropriate, some not so appropriate for a kid, but you know —

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): But it was good, uh, good stuff to hear, uh, you know as a kid. It was just so captivating. Every time I would listen to these stories, he would- he would draw me in, uh, like I said I'd be completely captivated by- by just the bravery- bravery of these men, through so much uncertainty. I mean, if you look back at the time in World War Two. This was a new ballgame, you know, when they were World War One, it was- it was supposed to be the war that ended all wars —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): It was such a, uh, a disastrous thing that- that we could never do this again, you know. And then World War Two comes around and it's- it's all these- this new machinery, these uh, these weapons that have mass destruction. And, uh, a lot of these men going overseas, well all of them, they didn't know what they were headed in for.

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): And so, I just always found that such, you know, such a- uh, such an intriguing subject. And I- I would always sit there. I wouldn't ask too many questions; I would just sit there and listen to my grandfather talk about these stories. Uh, and, you know, just- going through all that, it instilled such a, uh, a sense of pride and country for me, uh and, you know, when- when I would go to school and all these kids would uh, we'd have to do a report on who your heroes were. Uh, you know, everybody in- in Chicago would do Michael Jordan and Walter Payton. And I'm doing a report on Bernard Butcher, my grandfather. —

(ZW): That's awesome.

(JP): You know, cause I just- yeah, that- that was my superhero. You know, he was a living superhero that- that was able to go over it- go overseas and, you know, one of the greatest generation that- that helped save the world. That's- that's how I saw it in my eyes, um, that- that was a huge part of- of my decision, you know. Just uh, listening to these stories and seeing my grandfather go outside and hang the flag on the front porch, you know, the pride that he had in that, and, uhm, you know. I- I was just- I took that experience into, uh, into high school, and still at this time, you know, as I'm going through high school, I'm not thinking about joining the military. Again, nobody in my family did it. It wasn't- it wasn't something that- that we did. We were a blue-collar family, uhm, and I- I was going to private school at that time on a, uh, on a wrestling scholarship. And you know, nobody in that school was going into the military, they're all talking about university. Uhm, and then comes a point, my junior year I get injured, and I'm leaving- uh, I'm leaving private school because I can't wrestle anymore, so that- that's out the window. So, I end up going, you know we can't afford it, so I go to public school my senior year —

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And I'm sitting in class one day and the teacher's saying, you know, "What- what are you doing now that you, uh," asking all the kids, you know, "What are you doing after your, uh, your senior year?" One of the kids says military. Now this is a new thought to me. 'Cause not that I —

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): not that I ever thought negative to it, I just- I thought that's why you did in World War Two.

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): You know, that's what you did with the draft. Uh. People don't do that. So, it- it sounded like such an interesting idea. And, uhm, I take it back to my family. I tell my mom and my brothers, I think I'm thinking about joining the- the Army or the Navy, Airforce. They're like, you're crazy. You know, that's- just brushed me off. Alright, go back to doing what you're doing, not happening. But then I- I talked to my grandparents and uh, my uncles and they're like, that sounds like a great idea. And then that sparked something in me, like this is real. I can do this, you know. I can- I can join the military. So, I went, and I spoke to the recruiters. I had a, uh, my grandmother, her- her, uh, her brother was a- was a Master- Master Chief in the Navy. I never met him at the time he was off in Florida. But, uh, she's like, "You should join the Navy, they have better food than the Army."

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): That was her- her reasoning for that. But I- you know the reason- the real reason was she thought it was safer.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, uh, so we had the- the Navy recruiter come over to the house as- as he starts talking, my grandfather's sitting with me, talking to the recruiter, and uh, as he gets- gets through with the, you know- uh, my grandfather gives me, you know, the blessing to- to go ahead and join the service. And, uh, the funny thing is, years later, uh, found out that that recruiter would go back and check on my grandfather every now and then, they became friends after that.

(ZW): That's awesome.

(JP): But, yeah. It was really cool. But even at that point, I still wasn't- I didn't- I didn't join the service because my- both my grandparents became ill. So,

after I got the okay, I'm like, this is where I'm going, I'm heading out the door, now. I got- I got my pass. I'm ready. Uhm, come that summer when I was supposed to leave, both of my grandparents fall ill. So, I was thinking, I gotta stick around now. So, uhm, I don't know the coll- I don't know how to figure out the college route, I knew I couldn't pay for it. So, I'm going to work in a steel mill, now. You know, that's- that's my path. I'm- I'm working at it for- for about a year, and that's- I figure that's what I'm doing. Uhm, and then, uh, both of my grandparents pass away, and I'm like, well now, uh, now I'm- I'm joining the service. That was my, you know, they- they wanted me to join the service, and now they- they both passed away within six months of each other, and I was like well this is- this is my opportunity now where I'm gonna go, you know, make my grandfather proud and- and join the service, so.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): Um. When I- when I ended up joining and I left a, uh, a couple month, uhm, after they passed, and that was the first time I was ever out of the mid-west. I mean, I was- I was a city guy in Chicago, and we never left the- the mid-west. If we went on vacation, that was to Indiana or Wisconsin —

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And my first plane trip was to, uh, was right after bootcamp. And, uh, in Great Lakes. Took a plane ride down to Gulf Port, Mississippi where I, uh, did my A School. So, that- I mean and they, uh- a pretty, uh, pretty roundabout way to get into the military. But —

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): Like they say, everything happens for a reason.

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): And I uh —

(ZW): Indeed.

(JP): I think that was where- where God put me at the time. So, yeah, was a- uh, um, looking back on it, it seems like everything fell into place the way it was supposed to.

(ZW): Yeah, I think- I mean first of all, that's really inspirational. And, you know, thank you for your service. But also, I- I wanna say that, uhm, like in my family, I never really grew up in that- in like a military household —

(JP): Yeah.

(ZW): or really anyone in my family who had a military background, and even up 'til college I just didn't really understand, uhm, like that sacrifice and serving country. Uhm, and so, I think when I took this internship at the VA, it has, like listening to *Borne the Battle*, I think that's one of the biggest points of *Borne the Battle*, is really showing that, you know, telling the stories of Veterans and people in the military and showing that they're really, you know, serving the country and making sacrifices that are important, I think it's made a big impact on me especially, so.

(JP): Yeah —

(ZW): That's really cool.

(JP): Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah that's- that's a great point. I mean there's so- when I was in the service, there's so many different backgrounds of- of uh, people. And- and they all came to- they came for different reasons, you know. It's- it's- everyone had a, uh, a different path to get there. I had a buddy whose father was a millionaire oil, uh, tycoon —

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): And you know, he- he did it because his- his uncles did it.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, he figured this is his way, you know, to serve his countr — so many different, uhm, ways to get there. And- and just being able to, uhm, you know, when you get into bootcamp it becomes such a culture shock at first, where, you know, like, it's all these different people. Like, I never- like I said, I grew up in Chicago. So, I never really, uh, hung out with guys from New York, and I definitely didn't hang out with guys from the deep south. You know, these- these- and it was cool to see everybody kind of come together and form- form a, uh, a brotherhood around that. And, all the way through when we went on our um- our deployments. Most of the time I spent as a Seabee was in, uh, was south and central America. And, uh, I mean I was on a lot of detachments. And to have- have a small group of guys, uh, we- we usually had about 12 to 20 guys going in a

detachment, be able to come from all around the country, and then, you know, get shipped across- across the world —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): and- and be able to keep that bond and work together to- to accomplish a goal, is just- it was amazing to me.

(ZW): Right, yeah, really amazing. So, Mr. Pennington, could you tell me about a close friend or a great leader you had in the military?

(JP): Yeah, yeah. I think a person that comes to mind would be, uh, would be Bobby Fly. He was a- a buddy of mine who was, at the time, a few, uh, a couple ranks- a couple ranks above me. And when, uh, when I got down to Mississippi, went on my first deployment in Puerto Rico, and, uh, got back to home port, and really didn't know too much about- about the military. Again, I was jumping into this, pretty, you know, cold feet. I didn't- I didn't know- I didn't know any- I didn't have any modern-day family members to tell me about what to expect in the military. I had my grandfather but that was in World War Two.

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): [Laughter] You know, experience has changed —

(ZW): Yeah, definitely a little different.

(JP): So —

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): So, uh- yeah, yeah. Just a little. I, uh, when I got back to home port, I- I ran into this guy, Bobby Fly, who was a- a- turned out to be one of my, uh, best friends later on. But he was able to- to kind of navig- help me navigate the military and understand, uh, uh, really just military life. I didn't [inaudible] where you have to, uh- how to go through the ranks. How to achieve better. 'Cause a lot of times when you're in the military, and I'm- I'm sure you can, uh, attest to this. You have- so many different segments. You have guys that got in there, on their first- first enlistment. And then they say, why am I here? Why did I sign up? How do I get out of here? I mean—[Laughter].

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): There's- there's so many stories of people that do such drastic things to try to get out of their first enlistment —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): And, you know, insanity. But then you have- have people that say, you know, that this is- I like the military, I'm gonna get out after four years. Uh, and then you have people that wanna climb the- the ranks. I always wanted to go a little bit higher in the military. So, when I ran into this, uh, this guy Bobby Fly, he- he was at West Point — or I'm sorry, uh, Annapolis for a while.

(ZW): Mmm.

(JP): And then he ended up going to become a Seabee, as well. He left Annapolis to become enlisted. Uh, with the ultimate goal to be a Warrant Officer and uh, be a helicopter pilot. So, now I'm talking to this guy, and he's- he's telling me about all these great plans he has. You know, super smart guy. And he's- I'm gonna- I'm gonna, uh, switch over to the Army, and then I'm gonna become a Warrant Officer and then I'm going to become a pilot. He spoke to recruiters about it, he found all this path out on his own.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): And, just seeing him operate on that, uhm, uh, it was really neat to me. And he was able to help me guide my career and get onto a path that would make me successful, as well. So, I'm not just taking four years to be in the military and then I get out and I say, well, I did four years, but what did I really- what did I really accomplish? And I think- I think a lot of Vets, uh, uh, can- can get into that funk. And, it's great that you did four years, but while you're doing that, make sure you're setting yourself up so if you get out of the military —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): You have something to- to go on after that. Uhm, and he helped me identify that, and really find my way. Uhm, and then, uhm, while, uh, while we were buddies in the military, he uh, he asked me, "Well what do you want to do?" like a career counselor. You know, I want to get out, get into the corporate field. "Well, you should get into recruiting, and that'll- that'll give you a launching point." So, I did. So, I ended up, uh, putting in a, uhm, a request to, uh, to go onto recruiting duty, uhm. I never heard- and the funny thing about that is, I never heard anything back.

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): I put in my request for recruiting, never heard anything back. So, now we're- you know, we go to Iraq [Laughter]. So- well, Kuwait and then to Iraq. And, uh, six, seven months into the tour, I get a call from the, uh, to say, you know, you gotta head back to basecamp. No idea what this is about. I'm worried that something's wrong with my family. So, I get back and they said, "You gotta pack all your stuff, in two days you're going back stateside for recruiting duty."

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): So, [Laughter].

(ZW): Surprise.

(JP): Yeah, again, where Bobby- Bobby Fly helps me out, you know. Got me back stateside uh, with a suggestion. So, uh, yeah. I think- I think that was somebody that was really impactful. Uh, in my uh- my time in the military. Also, uh, direct impact on my post- military life, and uhm, looking back I really see that.

(ZW): Right. That's- that's fantastic. I think, not to- not to plug our podcast so much, but I think part of the reason I think *Borne the Battle* is so fascinating is we do, like, a really, we have this concerted effort to really try to talk to as many Veterans as possible, in as many fields as possible to really highlight the things and skillsets that you gain from the military that can really launch you into a career later. And so —

(JP): Absolutely.

(ZW): That's always one of our questions. So, on, uhm, in that regard, Mr. Pennington, could you maybe describe a skillset that you gained in the military that contributed to your success?

(JP): Yeah, I- I really think it's uh, uh. Well the- the most direct, I would say, is organizational leadership. So, when I try to attribute that- when I'm speaking with hiring managers about what, uh, what Veterans have to offer- have to offer, uhm, I really like to tell 'em, you know, don't- don't look at it as these were leaders in the military. Look at it as these were leaders in one of the most difficult environments, one of the most difficult corporate structures in the world.

(ZW): Right.



(JP): You know, and, uh, and that's- that's a, uh- I think that's the main skill that I learned in there is how to- how to lead, and, uh, and to, uh, to navigate a difficult environment. Because the military doesn't have a lot of flexibility, if you're trying to follow a process and they say "no," the answer's no.

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): [Laughter] There's no- there's no getting around it, this is- this is the government.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, uh, really trying to- having those, uh, uhm, leadership skills in an organization to- alright, well this is a no path. But, uh, let's see how we can- we can change what we're doing to, uh, to- to have it approved, and, uh, get it accepted on the right path. That- that's one of the, uh, the main skills I- I learned as a, uhm, in the military, and, the other that's kind of – I don't know if it's a skill or a, uh- uh really just something that I learned while I was in is —

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): is don't always say no. You know, I- I try not to say no, as much as possible. If something comes up and- and a leader would ask me in the military, "Can you do this?" I- I didn't see that as can I, I saw that as an opportunity. If I say no, that door shuts, there's no opportunity. If I say yes, and I don't know at the time, I can figure it out. And if I get that accomplished, now- now I- I set myself up on a better path. So —

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): So, resisting saying no to opportunities, and accepting them, even if you don't have all the answers at that point, accept 'em and figure 'em out. Uhm, and I- I try to pass that on to a lot of the, uh, the Veterans that we run into at recruiting events, where- where they might come up to the table, uh, ask about positions. And it's like, you know, this one may not match up exactly what you're looking for. But- but do me a favor, check it out, you know, be- be able to, uh, be able to- to accept the position, maybe take a step back in what the exact role you're looking for, but that can propel you two steps forward. So —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): You know, don't say no to opportunities. Look 'em head on and, uh, and go for it.

(ZW): That's really good advice, thank you. Uhm, Mr. Pennington, can you tell me a little bit about what prompted your transition out of the military? How did you- how did you end up at Allstate? [Laughter].

(JP): Sure, sure. Well, I saw- I saw the military as a career. I didn't- I didn't want to- I never wanted to get out. After I got past the rough, you know, the- the initial, uh, uh four-year tour —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): actually, mine was a five-year tour. I figured, I'm past that, I- I'm in a leadership role now, why get out? Um. But I had a, uh, some injuries on my- my right leg and went through a few dozen surgeries, and the, uh- while I was in recruiting duty, I even asked, well can I just- can I do this? You know- if I can't- If I can't meet standards on my leg, can I at least do recruiting duty to finish out? I have eight years left. Uh, and, the Navy's like, nah, nah, if you can't do everything, you can't do anything.

(ZW): Right on.

(JP): So, yeah. So they uh- they, uh, retired me out early for a medical retirement, and, when I got out, I, uhm, said, well I have to put these recruiting, uh, recruiting management skills —

(ZW): To good use.

(JP): 'cause I had led an office- yeah, yeah. I did it for six years- I led an office for six years. And we were, uh- uh office of the year for- for, uh, two of those years. And, you know, we were- it was successful, so I'm like, I can do this. I understand it. I don't- I don't want to, uh, that's what I want to do. So, when I got out, this was dur- in a down economy. Right now, we're, you know, we're up. But this was in an economy where nobody was hiring. So, I was looking for opportunities and I ran across one with the, uh, the state of Illinois, where they wanted me to help fix some of these offices that they had, uh, around the area. And- and, that were, uh, Veteran employment offices but they weren't producing as well. But the problem was, it didn't pay anything. I mean- it- it, barely anything.

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): It was barely enough to- to cover my uh, mortgage at the time.

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): So, you know, but then I also had an opportunity that paid a little bit more, but it was just, uh, it wasn't- it wasn't what I wanted to- to do. So, I had an option. I could- I could get the quick money, and, live in this career with a- a dead end, or a job with a dead end. Or I could take a career path. I could take a few steps back, and- and develop those corporate skills that I would need to go into the uh- in- into the direction I wanted. Or- so- so that's the path I chose. 'Cause at the time, there weren't a whole lot of military programs out there that would just accept your military skills. Everyone wanted some kind of corporate experience. I go in an interview and it's basically what they would tell you, you know, what kind of corporate experience do you have?

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): So, I- I took the step back, went into a job, uh, with less pay. I developed those skills in a quick amount of time, and I had something on my resume that an employer could look at and say, "Yes, he has corporate skills to go along with those years of leadership in the military." And soon enough a, uh, an insurance company, uhm, gave me a call, that's not Allstate. And they said, "Can you- can you help us build up our military program?" So —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): you know, it was a great opportunity, I jumped into that, we- we- it was very successful. We were the number one employer in, uh, the country for two straight years.

(ZW): Wow.

(JP): And then I went to a, uh, a panel to speak about it. To speak about the success that we had.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And one of the uh- one of the, uh, employers that- that was there with some of the panels had a question. So, I answered his question, and then afterwards I went up to him, and I said, "You know, did I answer- is that the answer you were looking for? Did I answer, uh, what you needed?" He's like, "Yeah, we need somebody like you at Allstate." I said, "Well, let's talk!" [Laughter], so, we got to talk and —

(ZW): [Laughter]. Here I am.

(JP): Yeah. Ended up at Allstate, like I said. You keep- if- if you look back, sometimes you just notice that you keep getting put in these positions where uh- where it- sets you on a path. And that was one of 'em, so. That's- that's where I ended up at Allstate. And, you know, the great thing about, when I went to meet with Allstate, I wasn't- I wasn't sold as this is where I want to go. And I had a great position where I was at, uhm, it's always scary leaving one to go to the next. So, I sat down and talked to him, and, they had all the right answers. They didn't want to just hire Veterans into the company. They wanted to set up a military program. And that's what I was looking for. I- I didn't want to get into a job where I wouldn't- where there was a company that wanted to set up a revolving door. You know, Veterans come in —

(ZW): And then leave.

(JP): they don't work out; they go back out. Yeah, and you see that so much where it's just recruiting. You know, it's just recruiting. And then, uhm, you know, when I spoke to Allstate, they said we want- we want to find out how to bring Veterans in the right way. Uh, you know, we'll give you- we'll give you some- all the support you need, we- we don't want to just do recruiting, we want to do retention, we want to do mentorship. We want the whole thing. So, uh, it sounded like a great opportunity, and, uh, I took 'em up on it, and about three years later, we're making some- some unbelievable progress.

(ZW): That's great. That's really great to hear, and it is a really interesting path, I mean. Like you said, you take one step back, you build yourself up, and you find- find yourself in a place you want to be.

(JP): Absolutely.

(ZW): So, that's really cool. So, could you speak to your role about- your role at Allstate now? What are- what are some of your duties, what's your position?

(JP): Sure, uhm, I'm- I'm the Director of the Military and Veteran program. And- and like I was saying, that- that entitles more than just, you know, just the recruiting aspect, but that is a large piece. Uhm, I have a team of, uh, military talent recruiters. Uh, that- that are based in Northbrook, Illinois.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And- and what they do, is they, uh, they're out there looking for, uh, Veterans, Guardsman, military spouses, uh, also. Which is a huge, kind of, I guess neglected part of the military community that a lot of people forget about.

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): But, they're out there trying to find these men and women and place them into, uh, positions whether it be at corporate, any of our corporate offices all over the country, or, uh, whether it be in some of our agencies, Allstate agencies, which we have over 10,000 throughout the country, so they're- they're always looking to hire. Uhm, so that- that's one part of, uh, my job, is managing the recruiting team. And then also, we're- we're looking on the retention side, as well. So, like I was saying, if- if you don't have to- if you can keep the people, you don't have to recruit as many people.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, uh, we wanna make- we wanna set this up so when Veterans come into Allstate, they see it as a military-friendly company.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And they wanna stay there. When you walk around the halls at Allstate, you'll routinely walk into people that have been here 20, 30 years, you know, and that- that's just because of the environment. That's the- that's the, you know, the Allstate environment. So, we want to, uh, we want to bring Veterans in and allow them to do that, as well. You know, the same, stick around and not have to bounce from company to company or have uncertainty.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, we're- we're setting up a mentorship program, that we're actually, uh, in the process of rolling out in May, on May 6, actually. And, uh, with this program, it's gonna be, uh, it's gonna be Veterans from, uh, within Allstate that are- are mentoring either existing Allstaters, or, uh, Veterans or people coming directly into the company from the service. And this could be informally, or it could be formally. We have a formal process set up where it's six- six to twelve months, and they meet regularly, they document it, uh, they get training. So that's one aspect. Or the other is informal, which I think is- is, uh, it suits some people even better. Where,

I know when I was getting out of the service, just a story. I was- There were certain things that you just didn't know if they were right.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): You know, I remember when I got out of the car to go into my first job, and I- it was the first job I- I had straight out of the military, I was going into this- this corporate building, and I got out, I start to walk, and I turn back to my car to reach in to grab a cover. 'Cause I'm- and I'm thinking, what am I looking for, you know.

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): Just- But it's instinct, but here in the military, that's you go to grab your cover, right? You're outside, you're going to work —

(ZW): Oh, man.

(JP): You gotta cover it.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): So, um, and then, you know, I- and then I think, what am I doing? And- and you know. And another one, I had a guy, when I was in- uh- when I was working at my, uh, my first job out of the military and I was- I was mentoring this young, uh- this young, uh, Veteran.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): And he was like, "I got a quick question for you. You know, can you- can you walk- I was walking into the building and I had my cellphone." He goes, "Is that okay? If I walk and talk on my cellphone?" [Laughter].

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): You know, and yeah, it's completely fine, do whatever you want. But those are- those are just some, you know, to you and I we understand that stuff, you know and Veterans, its, you know, but, if you're- if you're a uh, if you're a Vet walking around a building with a- with a lot of, uh, non-Veterans, you may not know, you know? And it could be something simple where if you had an informal mentor, you could ask him or her these questions that normal people might think 'well that's goofy'. But you would feel more comfortable asking a, uh, asking a mentor. Even if it's so much as should I call my boss Mr. Robinson or just Jerry? You know, I- I had that problem when I came out of the military. It's like, I

kept calling my boss Mr. so and so and he's like, you can call me, you know, Frank at any time [Laughter].

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): It's uh- so I wanna make sure we have those mentors set up in the- in the company so when they, uh- um- uh, when you have questions, you feel at ease. And- and maybe, you know, and they don't even have to be in the department. Sometimes that works better so you can feel more comfortable with. Uhm, so, that- that's another aspect, setting up the- that mentorship program. Uhm, and then, on top of that, we're looking to- to be able to take the leaders that are on- in the military, that are coming straight out. And I'm talking, you know, some of your mid to senior enlisted, to your junior officers that want to come out of the service, come out of the service, and into some type of leadership role in a- in a large organization.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): So, what we're uhm, what we're trying to put together here, I hope to have it rolled out by uh, by the end of the year, is a leadership program where when Veterans come out, we can set 'em up to uh, to do six month rotations in different areas of the company to see what works. Because, while you have that great experience in the military, you may not understand where you fit in a large organization with Allstate.

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): So, let's give you the opportunity, you know? Go out there and try different areas, see which one works best, and, uh, and then we'll, uh, we'll set you up in- in the department that makes the best fit. So, the- the leadership program's another aspect, and then, uhm, you know, a final piece of my job is, uh, is products, too. So, we wanna make sure we're an Allstate- or a military-friendly company. Again, not just a- as a recruiter, so. Uhm, part of what Allstate allowed me to do, is work with the- the policy team to ensure when we have active duty military, that if they go on deployment, we have products that allow them to- to put their policies on hold, without incurring any kind of, uh, penalties, or, you know, increased cost and coverage. So that's- that's been a- you know, a big win for us, being able to help uh, military Veterans- or active duty military on that side. So, my- my job here really encompasses all that, along with, uh, working with the- the Allstate Foundation on, uhm, on, uhm, supporting military charities that, uh, that are directly affecting our

community. So, uhm, we've done a lot of work with that uhm, through- through my time at Allstate. And, you know, that's- that's just a, uh, a phenomenal organization, the uh- the Allstate Foundation.

(ZW): Yeah, I saw that on the website about, uhm, I think- I think it said something along the lines of like, Allstate Veterans doing community service hours, or I saw some numbers about 7,237 volunteer hours were logged in 2016. Is that- is that what you're talking about?

(JP): Yeah, yeah and that- that was, uhm, for Veteran charities, specifically. So —

(ZW): Right.

(JP): I mean that's- we have, uh, the- the foundation's helping, you know, set up these, uh, these volunteer opportunities for- for not only our Veterans but our Veteran supporters in the company. Uhm, so, we do it through charitable work, so we're- we're always trying to, uh, to- to help better the, uh, the communities that we- we work in.

(ZW): That's really great. That's really a great philosophy. So, seeing that Allstate, as you say, is a military-friendly company, not just a recruiter, has Allstate received any form of recognition for the work it's doing with Veterans in the past couple years?

(JP): Yeah. Yeah, we've uhm- we've had uhm, multiple- multiple recognitions. I'd say the- the largest uhm, uh, that we've received since- since we started up this program, again, this- we- we've always been a military-friendly company, uh, dating back to our founder General Wood, who was a Marine Vet who actually started up Allstate.

(ZW): Hmm.

(JP): And we've had multiple leadership. The, uh the- One of the leaders that helped bring it in, was a, uhm, uh, an Army Veteran, who was the president of the company.

(ZW): Wow.

(JP): So, it's a stron- really strong military background at Allstate. Uhm, and. So, but we started up this formal initiative, just in, uh, the end of 2016. And since that time, we've already been, uh, ranked by G.I. Jobs Magazine as the number two military-friendly company, uh, in the country.



(ZW): Wow.

(JP): And, it's- it's been incredible, uh, uhm, you know, progress since we've- since we've kicked off this initiative. And then also, with the, uh, the ESG, we have our, uh, signed, uh, support for the ESG, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, and then also, we were just recognized as a, uh, a Patriot Employer for, uh, the ESG, as well.

(ZW): Oh cool, that's all great. It's good to hear that Allstate's getting recognition it sounds like it deserves. Uhm, and so, Mr. Pennington, do you have any interesting statistics about, uh, Allstate employees that are Veterans? Do you know how many they employ or, just anything that you can think of off the top of your head?

(JP): Yeah, yeah. I- I wish I could give you the total Allstate employee Veterans, but —

(ZW): That's okay, that's okay.

(JP): Yeah, company- companies didn't really start tracking the- the total, uh, a lot of companies, uh, until recently, and the problem is, with the size of Allstate, where we have, you know, 40 thousand something employees —

(ZW): Right, right.

(JP): It's hard to get back to all of them have them fill out a survey after they've been working here.

(ZW): [Laughter].

(JP): So, but we did start tracking them, uh, uh, when I came on board about two years ago, and- and really getting in depth with it. So, I think everybody has to track the, you know, the required, uhm, you know, are you a special disabled Vet, uh, are you a Vietnam era Vet? But that only captures that small amount. So, we- we really changed how we were capturing the Vets. And that's one of the large questions I get from other employers, is like, how do we- we're missing them. How do we- how do we find how many Vets we have in the company?

(ZW): Mm.

(JP): Uhm, and we try to break it down as, uh, as, uhm, detailed as possible. So that we're capturing just about every Vet that walks through the door, and, uhm, uh, and really breaking it down to did you serve- uh, have you

served? And, if I could give a tip to other employers out- out there that may have this question, because it's- it's a burning one in the military hiring community.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): You've gotta break- you can't leave it as Veteran. You've gotta leave it as- you know you've gotta have it in there have you ever served in the military? And the reason I say that is, I would have so many Vets, when I- I would routinely do a recognition to all the, uh, Veteran hires the we- and we still do this with our new agency owners, where we would present them in front of their, uh, their- their new peers.

(ZW): Mmhmm.

(JP): A recognition for being in the military, and I'd always have some people raise their hand out of the, you know, new class of, uh, employees, that would say, "I'm a Vet," I'd say, "Well, I got your form here- " or "I served in the military," "I've got your form here that you never served." He goes, "No, you said are you a Veteran. I never served overseas." So, you know —

(ZW): [Laughter]. Yeah.

(JP): There's still, there's still some Vets out there that not think they're a Vet, thinking Veteran of Foreign Wars. So, we broke it down to have you ever served in the military?

(ZW): [Laughter] right, yeah.

(JP): At any point. And, uh, last year, we brought in, uhm, about 400 and- 430 Veterans into our agencies. And then we brought in another 400, uh 400 or so Veterans into our corporate, uh, corporate positions. So, uh, big headway on there. And then this- this in 20, uh, 2019, we want to do a thousand Veterans, across the company, hire a thousand Veterans across the company —

(ZW): Wow.

(JP): in 2019, as well.

(ZW): That's great, that's really fantastic, and honestly, cool. Like [Laughter] it's interesting, as well, that you- you do track that. So, yeah.

(JP): Yeah, well, we want to track it for a couple reasons. One to, you know, to show what- what we're doing. But we also- we also wanna keep these names so when we have Veterans come into the company, we can recognize them.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): You know, and there's not a lot- Vets aren't always looking for recognition, but, it's- it's nice to sometimes be able to reach out —

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): On Veterans Day, or, you know, a military holiday, and say, "Hey, by the way, thanks for your service." And then also, you know, we have some of these Veteran employees that are working out well and doing a fantastic job, we- we like to recognize them in maybe some of our advertising. So, we're always- always trying to keep in contact with those Veteran- Veteran employees.

(ZW): Right. Uhm, and I guess to kind of round up this interview, Mr. Pennington, I wanna really thank you for being here. But I guess our final question that you like to ask, is what is a Veteran group, initiative, or program, that's either Allstate or somewhere else that you're really excited about? Uhm, that's up and coming.

(JP): Yeah, uh, we have a- a unbelievable organization called AVETS, and that's Allstate Veterans Engagement Team and Supporters. So, this was- this has been around for a, a uh, year before I got- before I came to Allstate.

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): Um, I know Phyllis Higgins was one of the people who really helped stand this up. And then the new president of AVETS right now is Jenna Ray Hines, they're doing an unbelievable job with this program, and what- what Allstate, what AVETS, uh, is, it's- it's volunteer Allstate employees that are Veterans, or they just, you know, just employees that really support the Veteran community. And they come together to help out at these, uh, these charity- charity, uhm, functions where, in the last year, they all got together and went to the Fisher House, and put, you know, planted flowers all around and then, you know, cleaned up the- the, uh, cleaned up the place and worked with some of the families that were staying at the Fisher House. Just, you know, stuff like that. They helped build houses in North Carolina. Uh, that's what they do on the charity side. And then also, they get together as a, uhm, as an engagement team,

routinely. So, on military holidays especially. And just show support for one another, and- and share ideas, you know, what can we be doing as a- as a company to, uhm, to help Veterans out? And I- I stay in close contact with the AVETS president to- to find out, you know, am I missing anything? You know, if Veterans need more mentorship, do they need more, what can we do to help the Veterans that are at our company? 'Cause, you know, it's one thing to bring 'em in. I'll- I'll say it again. It's one thing to bring 'em in. But what are you doing for 'em —

(ZW): To keep them.

(JP): Now that they're at Allstate.

(ZW): Yeah.

(JP): To keep 'em. To make 'em happy. To help 'em grow in their careers.

(ZW): Right.

(JP): Uhm. And that's- that's a huge part in that. And it just- it just reminds Veterans that are here that, hey, we didn't just put that, uh, that advertisement out there to make recruiting easy and to bring you in. We really wanna help, we value, uh, your military experience at this company. And, uh, we're here to- to grow with you, and, uh, help you along the way.

[00:54:46] Music

## **[00:54:51] CLOSING MONOLOGUE:**

(TI): No extra commercial at the end of this one. You guys had a pretty extended pre-game. Wanna thank Joseph Pennington for taking the time to get an interview from Zach. Zach and the rest of the interns, this episode was for you. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication over the year. Our interns here at *Borne the Battle* are unsung heroes. Uh, most of them spend time transcribing the episodes, word for word, that way those with hearing loss can go to our blogs at [blogs.va.gov](http://blogs.va.gov) [Link to VA's blog], they can go to each episode, and they can download a full transcript of each episode. So, uhm, I wanna recognize them, our interns, uh, for all the hard, but necessary work that they do.

This week's *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week is Marine Veteran Megan McClung. Megan served during Operation Iraqi Freedom. After graduating from the United States Naval Academy in May 1995, Megan was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant with the United States Marine Corps. She then received basic officer training and went on to complete

the Public Affairs Officer Qualification Course at Fort Meade, Maryland. In 1996, she began serving at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton as a public affairs and media officer. In 1999, Megan transferred to Parris Island, and following her time at Parris Island, Megan transferred to the 2nd Marine Air Wing at Cherry Point, North Carolina, where she again served as a public affairs officer. In 2003, Megan transferred to the Marine Reserves and began working as the east coast regional representative for the Marine for Life program at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In 2004, Megan took a civilian position with the military engineering and procurement contractor Kellogg Brown & Root and began working in Baghdad. After completing her one-year contract with Kellogg Brown & Root, Megan returned to active duty with the Marines, serving as the deputy public affairs officer for the U.S. Fleet Marine Corps Force, Atlantic. In February 2006, Megan deployed with 1 MEF for a year tour in Al Anbar Province, Iraq. There, she served as the public affairs plans officer at Camp Fallujah. During the final month of her deployment, Megan volunteered for duty with the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division of the United States Army. On December 6, 2006, while transporting media crews around the city of Ramadi, Megan's Humvee was struck by an IED, killing her and two other service members. During her career Megan received the Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal and the National Defense Service Medal. Megan was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery. She was the first female Marine officer to be killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom and the first female graduate of the United States Naval Academy to be killed in combat. She is remembered by her friends, family and fellow Marines as a dedicated service member and a skilled public relations officer. We honor her service.

That's it for this week's *Borne the Battle* program. We hope you enjoyed it. In addition to the *Borne the Battle* Veteran of the Week, we have the Veteran of the Day on all of our social media platforms. On Twitter [Link to VA's twitter page:

[https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca](https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwca)],

Facebook [Link to VA's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>, Instagram [Link to VA's

Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/deptvetaffairs/?hl=en>],

YouTube [Link to VA's YouTube page:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBvOzPLmbzjtpX-Htstp2vw>]. US

Department of Veteran Affairs. DeptVetAffairs. No matter the social media, you can always find us with that blue checkmark. Again, thank you again for listening and we will see you next week.

[00:58:23] Music

(Text Transcript Ends)